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Exploring the Origins of Marketing Thought and Practice in the United Kingdom

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper reviews the contents of the special issue.

Design/methodology/approach: Review article.

Findings: This special issue provides a realistic view of marketplace dynamics. These are often a stark contrast to those found in many marketing textbooks. Contextually, it differs from much of the extant literature via its focus on the United Kingdom.

Originality/value: The special issue engages with a context, series of industries and practices that continue to be underrepresented in marketing history and the history of marketing thought.

Keywords: Marketing history; history of marketing thought; United Kingdom; Great Britain.

Introduction

When we look at the history of marketing theory and practice, it rapidly becomes clear that most research published to date focuses on one context, namely, the United States. To be sure, the *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing* has engaged with other locations, most notably Canada, Ireland, Italy, Australia, along with the Soviet Union and its satellites (Tadajewski and Stole, 2016). As part of this ongoing geographical pluralisation of marketing history, we wanted to source contributions that devoted their scholarly attention to the United Kingdom. Two of the special issue editors hail from the country; the other has paid significant attention to university education in Great Britain (Jones and Tadajewski, 2015; forthcoming), so it seemed like a natural project to tackle. We think the effort has paid off.

As Richard Hawkins reveals in his extended survey of marketing practices from the ancient world through to the last century, the U.K. has witnessed a rich and varied tapestry of marketing practice. Interestingly, Hawkins' contribution to this issue does not provide us with a simple progressive narrative. He is a much more sophisticated and reflexive thinker than this; there is evidence of development and progression, but also regression in his account. Sometimes this is a function of large scale social changes – the fall of the Roman Empire being notably influential; at other times, it is a consequence of the actions of the state and government. Hawkins affirms that the latter is an element that needs to be treated as powerful when it comes to the development of marketing practice. As he reveals, legislation can shape, promote and delimit the actions of manufacturers, advertisers and those with trademarks and brands they wish to protect.

If we are permitted to generalise a little, this special issue paints a picture of marketplace dynamics that is a marked contrast – in many ways – to those we typically find in our textbook accounts of the development of marketing. Picking up any major textbook of recent years, the narratives are often deeply ahistorical and even fanciful. What we mean by the latter point is that they depict a marketing system in which consumer sovereignty and agency reign, where companies seek to provide what people need, want and desire. Of course, we are eliding a great deal of detail and

there are various caveats that could be mentioned. However, moving through the content in this special issue at a macro-level, what we think we have delivered is material that provides the kinds of empirical realism that our historical forebears – particularly the German Historical School – argued was of supreme importance in the educational experience.

The German Historical School of Economics (GHSE) and the marketing pioneers enveloped in this tradition wanted to reconnect marketing with the reality of the market (Jones & Tadajewski, forthcoming). This issue does exactly that. Valuably, the work of the GHSE is touched upon in the contribution which appears in this issue by Andrew Pressey on the development of marketing education. Marketing education at Birmingham was influenced by the GHSE through the conduit of its first Professor and Dean in the Faculty of Commerce, William James Ashley; a seminal figure in the development of our discipline whose contributions are only now being appreciated.

Pressey traces the trajectory of an early version of marketing education. His account begins at the cusp of twentieth century and narrates the development of our discipline in this institution all the way to the point when it has usually – but completely inaccurately – been stated that business and marketing education emerged in the UK (i.e. the 1960s). Schematically, Pressey unpacks the growing importance attached to marketing; the interest in ensuring customer satisfaction at a very early point in the twentieth century; the fact that people were envisaged as growing steadily more immune to advertising interventions and that this required a response; and, in a useful reminder, he documents how until the mid-century, marketing education reflected micro *and* macro emphases.

Marketing had not yet taken the managerial shape it was set to assume after the 1950s (although, we should point out, Birmingham was a leading institution in terms of the promotion of a managerialist scientism after this genealogical inflexion point). At Birmingham, however, the activist elements of the GHSE are *largely* occluded. Ashley was aware that he had to produce an educational offering that was consistent with the expectations of various stakeholders, many of whom were local business people. Even so, this does not mean that critique of any kind was absent in the industrial heartland of the UK. Far from it. As Pressey's manuscript reveals, there were challenges made to the status quo, with contentious debates being a bit of a hallmark of the seminars that ran throughout the academic calendar.

There is, to put it mildly, a great deal of ground being covered in this paper. It reminds us that there are resources awaiting consultation in university archives across the world that have remained untapped for large periods of time. They contain pearls that await revelation. And, like many other contributions in this vein, Pressey concludes with a call for further inquiry into the foundations of marketing at other institutions in the UK. We would extend this slightly and encourage people from wherever they hail to explore the emergence of marketing education in their countries. These exercises would help us understand the processes of translation and transformation that accompany the spread of marketing theory and practice around the globe.

Being sensitive to the works of the GHSE and the empirical realism they counselled was a blessing when we were trying to excavate the core themes of this special issue from the accepted papers. Reading across the content included in the pages that follow, there were various themes that were commensurate with the ontology, epistemology and view of human nature that are provided by German Historical advocates. In case a reminder is necessary, they were aware that collusion was a feature of the marketplace; and that government did intervene in the market, with beneficial intentions guiding their actions. In their literature, the consumer was not necessarily a sovereign being, but someone who made limited choices from a circumscribed range of offerings; with structural constraint(s) sometimes being the norm. In their own ways, multiple papers in this issue

touch upon these topics. What we have in this special issue, then, are historically rich narratives that provide us with a wealth of insights into specific markets, industries, and time periods that contrast markedly with the assumptions that students are all too frequently (and uncritically) exposed to, and, equally importantly, highlight that even when practitioners engage in sophisticated marketing practices, that it does not guarantee them business success. This is particularly the case when the technological environment and consumer behaviour are both in transition. Hiroki Shin's rigorous study of the railway industry is most valuable in helping us understand these complex issues.

Shin's paper documents how an industry which has long been criticised for its marketing practice was, in reality, drawing upon a substantial range of advanced marketing techniques. Indeed, this is an understatement. This industry appreciated the importance of marketing at an individual company level; this became more developed after organisational consolidation; and was also supported by trade groups. Shin's analysis is truly illuminating. It unpacks the practices being used, the financial controls in place, and the interconnections between different organisations. The reader gets a real sense of the battle being waged in this service industry to halt what seemed like an inevitable decline courtesy of the growing competition from the car and motorbus.

Despite the attentions of the railway industry to marketing, what Shin's analysis makes very apparent is that if the wider environment is shifting away from your product, then marketing may not expand your market. This could be viewed as a counterpoint to those schools of social theory (i.e. some interpretations of critical theory) which depict marketing as extremely powerful, transforming the social climate, and shaping consumer behaviour with little resistance (cf. Tadjewski, 2018). Equally, it undermines the seductions of the marketing concept. Being good at marketing will not always save an industry from suffering at the hands of environmental and social change. The best that marketing can do in such situations, Shin suggests, is slow down the decline which would have been even worse without the support provided by innovative product development, advertising, and pricing strategies.

In terms of their empirics, David Clampin and Nicholas White's study provides a counterpoint to Shin's paper. They focus their attention on the maritime industry. This is essentially a case study that bears testament to organisational conservatism, inattention to customer needs, and a profound level of marketing myopia. Where Shin charts highly developed marketing practices, Clampin and White document intransigence and a commitment to a product orientation. What this means, in effect, is that the maritime industry (i.e. cruise liners etc.) felt that their ships, along with accompanying mechanical statistics, were the key to stimulate consumer desire for their product and service. They were wrong. But it did not stop them producing and publishing lots of marketing communications reflecting very realistic images of ships, rather than the ends to be achieved via the service (e.g. the experiences being offered or the locations people were travelling to). For those involved with teaching marketing theory, history or a basic principles course, they would do well to use the Shin article in conjunction with the Clampin and White study to illustrate the complexities involved in the effective performance of marketing, the lack of guarantees it offers for success, but the high likelihood of failure if it is completely ignored. Clampin and White's account contains numerous examples of poor decision-making by firms, as well as a range of images that can be used to effectively convey their core argument. They literally add colour and texture to Ted Levitt's related ideas.

Treading a middle ground between these papers, Jones and Richardson document a forgotten history of a largely forgotten product offering – the cyclecar. These were basically a hybrid of motorcycle and automobile technologies intended as the first cars for the masses. Jones and Richardson rethink the limited number of historical accounts that devote attention to this product

and undertake an unusual – but methodologically highly fruitful approach – by combining content analysis of cyclecar advertisements, with factor analysis, to produce a positioning map. They outline the appeals being made, the attributes associated with specific brands, and the likely target audience for these rather novel products. Their historically rounded account then speculates about the decline in the popularity of this mode of transportation, as well as its re-emergence in modified form recently in the hands of Morgan's "3 Wheeler". In short, this paper gives readers an insight into an unusual technology and the marketing strategies that surrounded it. This is one of the first studies to engage with this product from a marketing perspective. It is consequently of historical import.

As we mentioned in the call for papers for this special issue, when we started to explore the area of historical research on UK marketing in more detail, it was apparent that it had received limited attention by historians in our area. This seems decidedly odd given that the UK houses some fantastic marketing and consumption related archives like Mass Observation (which now has a major online presence) and the History of Advertising Trust. Of course, these have been tapped by scholarly investigators, but should be explored in much greater depth. Ph.D. students looking to make their contribution to marketing history or the history of marketing thought, for example, need to view them as prime sources for the kinds of empirical research that can result in substantive contributions to knowledge.

Two of the papers we include deal with these issues in a roundabout way. One reviews what is on offer at the History of Advertising Trust (HAT) archive. Moir, Read and Towne highlight the range of material available for consultation in this excellent collection. They focus upon the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency materials, those archived by the H.J. Heinz organisation (a food processing company) as well as the Hovis company (bread related products), Butlin's (a holiday firm), and Vimto (that odd purple drink that tastes lovely). Put otherwise, HAT has a vast range of material, some of which has been explored in depth, other aspects much less so. As such, a visit to the archive should be on the agenda of every serious marketing historian. For business people reading this issue, the paper also discusses the corporate services that HAT offers. Academics reading this paper should be relieved to hear that HAT has multiple income streams (and seems very adept at marketing itself). This bodes well for the longevity of the archive.

When readers explore the other articles published in this issue, what becomes apparent is that references to J.W. Thompson are reasonably frequent, and some of the topics that Moir *et al.* indicate can be studied in greater depth using their collections (e.g. rationing and related issues) appear as well. Those looking to develop research projects in these areas should consult the work by Mick Hayes on government marketplace intervention during the Second World War and Michael French's fascinating exploration of the chocolate manufacturer, Rowntree, and their invocation of themes of modernity, science and use of research insights courtesy of their ad agency, J.W. Thompson.

As is usual with contributions that appear in the pages of the JHRM, French's analysis contains much that goes beyond "mere" historiographic interest. Certainly, it is an engrossing read. The narrative is intriguing, it sheds considerable light on the relationship between a UK firm and their advertising agency, but it goes so far beyond this that it deserves the attention of those who do not consider themselves historically-minded. Reading French closely, we gain insights into the early use of class-based market segmentation in a period well before Wendall Smith was writing his now famous article on the topic. In this respect, French's arguments complement those of Ronald Fullerton well, as the latter has undertaken extensive efforts to trace the use of market segmentation (both in practice and theory) in multiple historical periods (e.g. Fullerton, 2012; 2016).

Likewise, French can be productively read alongside the debates around the marketing concept. His paper details the prevalence of a competitor orientation in the confectionary industry and a willingness among practitioners to curtail marketplace dynamics. As he indicates, competitor agreements are usually fragile affairs, and prone to acrimony and breakdown. These and related issues are weaved throughout his examination of two marketing campaigns. Be warned, reading French's paper about Rowntree is likely to both inform your intellect and stimulate your appetite.

On a related theme, Hayes' study of marketplace controls is especially interesting for the neophyte and established researcher alike. For the doctoral candidate, the logic of his argument, his method of tackling the extant literature, particularly the way he cleaves space for his contribution on the importance and impact of "pooling" and "zoning" in the period around World War II, is impeccable. His analysis unfolds beautifully and exemplifies the type of approach that should be seen in a high-quality Ph.D. (Hayes' project is part of his thesis). Like other recent research (e.g. Harbor, forthcoming), he begins with a content analysis of advertising, impresses with the sheer weight of material that he examines, and then rethinks his analytic approach. This is reflexive and indicative of thoughtful academic practice.

By being extremely attentive to the literature and the material he is systematically content analysing, he notes that other publications muddle practices that should be kept separate (i.e. rationing with aspects of "zoning" and "pooling"); practices that can only really be unpacked via a close reading of the relevant advertising material. Clearly, this entails a large amount of additional research – and no doubt would have been enough to set most people groaning when their carefully laid plans started to unravel – but Hayes is not to be deterred. His examination and categorisation of food, drink and confectionary advertising provides numerous novel insights into practices that are simply not studied in any substantive way in currently published material. It is safe to say that Hayes has articulated his contribution well.

Importantly, one of the take-aways of his analysis is the production of an "advertising message framework". This is a smart move which will ensure the citation of his work going forward. But, such frameworks are always limited, always likely to be rethought when new archival materials present themselves, thereby ensuring the citation and development of his scholarship in future.

What academics with a more general interest in marketing theory may take from this content – above and beyond the interesting material that Hayes presents – is that his analysis undermines core concepts in our literature. The reference to marketplace intervention should indicate that the consumer is being displaced as the centre of the business universe (Keith, 1960). They are not the king or queen who can demand the products and services they require. Their favourite brand might have been blended in a pool of others, leaving behind only a generic product for the course of the war period (i.e. "pooling"). Alternatively, they may not live in a location where they can obtain their frequently bought product (i.e. because of "zoning"). In this time and environment, there were ways to secure highly desirable items that were in short supply (i.e. the black market), but for many it was a period when their sovereignty was limited. More than this, Hayes indicates that the marketplace is an arena where misbehaviour – a currently hot topic (Daunt and Harris, 2012; 2014) – was rife. Misbehaviour in this context means a willingness to engage in violence when confronted with the frustrations of limited product assortments or the absence of desired brands.

Misbehaviour might, for some, be in the eye of the beholder. The same can be said of consumer irrationality when it comes to their purchasing habits. Patsiaouris returns to a topic he has explored previously in this *Journal*, conspicuous consumption. This is an area that continues to attract significant research attention and indeed, courtesy of the Kardashians, and a host of other

socialisation vehicles, continues to play a prominent role in many peoples' lives. Patsiaouris provides a succinct summary of Thorstein Veblen's work on this topic and argues that the use of this material continues to be largely selective and often ahistorically presented or developed. By the end of the paper, it becomes clear to the reader that Patsiaouris envisages his contribution as filling a void that has been exacerbated by the cognitive psychological focus of much consumer research. This approach to the consumer and their behaviour is, itself, largely ahistorical. It abstracts the individual from the environment in which they live and have grown up, preferring to study human behaviour in laboratory conditions.

Patsiaouris' paper, by contrast, offers a structurally sensitive, sociologically nuanced, and historical account of the changing dynamics of the UK industrial context and the way this has influenced how people live and consume. The sweep of this study is hugely impressive. The range of literature, the engagement with theory, and the flow of the narrative, means that this manuscript will be highly useful for researchers and educators alike, particularly those wanting to add a historical dimension to any lectures on this and related consumption topics.

What seems to be untheorised or at least remains largely underarticulated in Patsiaouris' work is an element of moral condemnation. This creeps into the manuscript early on and remains a spectral presence in various places. It would have been interesting to see this aspect of the narrative brought to the foreground and justified. After all, when we refer to consumer "irrationality", we typically have a benchmark in mind. There are many reasons why this element of the project is backgrounded for now. Patsiaouris may be currently working on this aspect; alternatively, he is astute enough to register the pitfalls of moral condemnation where consumption is concerned. As the first generation of critical theorists found out, criticising the buying habits of various groups is probably going to lead to an accusation of elitism (or something similar). Patsiaouris does not fall into this trap. All in all, this is another strong contribution to what we believe is an important collection of articles on a context that requires much more exploration. The new editor of the *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing* awaits your response.

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